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CHURCH POLITICS AND THE COMPUTUS: FROM MILAN TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

To the memory of the Very Revd Professor Henry Chadwick

Abstract

This article examines the influence of political considerations on the dates adopted for the celebration of Easter at various times and places. In fourth-century Milan the Alexandrian reckoning was introduced by Bishop Auxentius, who was in harmony with the official theology of the day, as a gesture of independence from the recalcitrant church at Rome, and maintained by his successor St Ambrose despite theological disagreements. In the early fifth century Rome was gradually compelled to abandon its longstanding refusal to celebrate Easter after 21 April, a process culminating in Leo I's defeat in the dispute over the date to be observed in 455; the decisive blow was delivered by Proterius of Alexandria to the advantage of both himself and the Emperor Marcian, who was thus avenged on the pope who had delayed ratifying the Acts of Chalcedon. In 501 the old Roman Easter was revived by Pope Symmachus as a snub to Constantinople. Lastly, I examine the notion advanced by Archbishop Ussher that certain Welsh clergy, in the mid-ninth century, appealed to Constantinople in defence of the *latercus* against the Roman Easter.

Keywords

Alexandria, St Ambrose, Constantinople, Easter, *latercus*, Leo I (pope), Marcian (emperor), Proterius, Rome, Symmachus (pope).

Milanese Easter[1]

In 387 Easter in Alexandria was celebrated on 30 Pharmouthi, or 25 April. Although the city's Christians were notoriously fond of fighting,

[1] I thank Immo Warntjes and David Pelteret for helpful comments.

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we hear of no dispute about that date; it was otherwise in Asia Minor, where it needed to be justified in an anonymous homily,[2] and it was also otherwise in north-central Italy, where St Ambrose of Milan, whose church followed Alexandrian and not Roman usage,[3] justified the date in a letter to the bishops of Aemilia that dates the feast by Egyptian as well as Roman months and designates years not by the consuls but by the era of Diocletian.[4]

Ambrose claims to have been consulted by very many bishops of the Roman church about the next year's Easter (§8, p 225 Zelzer):

> *Vnde necesse fuit, quia etiam post Aegyptiorum supputationem et Alexandrinae ecclesiae definitionem episcopi Romanae ecclesiae per litteras plerique meam adhuc expectant sententiam, quid existemem scribere de die paschae; nam licet futuri diei paschae inciderit quaestio, tamen etiam in reliquum quid tenendum uideatur aperimus, si qua quaestio talis incurrerit.*

> 'Whence it has become necessary, since, even after [the establishment of] the Egyptian reckoning and [= that is] the definition by the church of Alexandria, very many bishops of the Roman church have written to ask for my opinion [lit. 'are still waiting by letter for my opinion'], to set down what I think about the date of Easter; for although it is next Easter whose date is in question, I am stating the principle I believe should apply in future too, should any such question confront us.'

[2] Edited by Floëri and Nautin (1957). In the 30-year table for 328–357 presented at the Council of Sardike (Serdica, Sofia) in 342 or 343 (Chadwick (2001), 241 n 1) by the Eastern bishops (who in fact gathered at Philippopolis, now Plovdiv), and published by Schwartz (1905), 121–3 (see too Chadwick (2001), 186; Mosshammer (2008), 184–6), the latest date for *luna XIIII*, 19 April, would, if it fell on Sunday, require Easter to be kept on the 26th, but in 349, when the table gave this date, it was a Wednesday, so that Easter was the 23rd; other late dates for *luna XIIII* were Saturday, 18 April 330 and Friday, 17 April 341. Assuming the table was extended for another cycle (358–387), in 360 *luna XIIII* was Tuesday, 18 April, again entailing Easter on the 23rd; in 371 (with Schwartz's emendation) it was Sunday, 17 April, with Easter on the 24th, but in 387 the Sardike table set *luna XIIII* on Monday, 22 March, entailing Easter on the 28th.

[3] At Alexandria, Easter fell on the Sunday, found from a 19-year table, following the *luna XIIII* next after 21 March, hence between 22 March and 25 April and between *luna XV* and *luna XXI*; at Rome, where an 84-year table was used, it fell between 22 March and 21 April and between *luna XVI* and *XXII*. The most recent discussions are Mosshammer (2008) 190–245 and (for the lunar calendars as such) Holford-Strevens (2008), 173–8, 187–92.

[4] St Ambrose, *Epistula extra collectionem* 13, edited by Michaela Zelzer in CSEL 82, 222–34, who had also vindicated its long-doubted authenticity in Zelzer (1978); the case is not vitiated by her misinterpretation of *nos* (§14) as the Western church at large ('im Westen', 195) instead of the diocese of Milan. The letter is studied at length in Lejbowicz (2010).

In the narrowest sense, there was only one bishop of Rome, Pope Siricius, whose Easter tables offered him only a choice between two Easter dates that were both illegitimate by Roman rules;[5] but if he had written to seek Ambrose's advice, we may be sure that the *Epistula ad Siricium papam* would have been a treasured muniment of the Milanese church. Nor can suburbicarian bishops have written to Milan behind the pope's back; what would have happened when Siricius found out they intended to celebrate on a different day? That leaves 'the Roman church' to mean the Western patriarchate as a whole. Even so, 'very many' bishops must be an exaggeration; but by making this claim, Ambrose could make his letter look like a special favour ('I am writing to *you* while *they* wait') rather than an assertion of metropolitan authority he may not in the Aemilian bishops' eyes have possessed.

The reason for celebrating so late was that the all-important *luna quarta decima*, the fourteenth day of the first lunar month, set down for 18 April, in 387 fell on Sunday, which required the feast to be postponed by a week. Ambrose cites precedents from 373 and 377 (§14, pp. 228–9):

> *Nam temporibus paulo superioribus cum incidisset quarta decima luna mensis primi in dominicam diem, sequenti altera dominica celebrata sollemnitas est. Octogesimo autem <nono>*[6] *anno et nonagesimo tertio ex die imperii Diocletiani <hoc factum est: nam octogesimo nono anno ex die imperii Diocletiani>*[7]*, cum quarta decima luna esset nonum kalendas Aprilis, nos celebrauimus pascha pridie kalendas Aprilis; Alexandrini quoque et Aegyptii ut ipsi scripserunt, cum incidisset quarta decima luna uicesimo et octauo die Famenoth mensis, celebrauerunt pascha quinta die Farmutii mensis, quae est pridie kalendas Aprilis, ac sic conuenere nobiscum. Rursus nonagesimo tertio anno a die imperii Diocletiani, cum incidisset quarta decima luna in quartum decimum diem Farmutii mensis, quae est quintum idus Aprilis, quae erat dominica dies, celebrata est paschae dominica Farmutii uicesimo et primo die, qui fuit secundum nos sextum decimum kalendas Maias.*
>
> 'For a little while back, when the 14th lune of the first month fell on Sunday, the feast was celebrated on the other Sunday, that following. This happened in the 89th and 93rd year from Diocletian's accession to

[5] Namely 21 March, before the upper solar limit of the 22nd, or 18 April, which was *luna XV*, unacceptable at Rome: Krusch (1880), 62; Schwartz (1905), 46; Mosshammer (2008), 210.

[6] Added by Zelzer.

[7] *Hoc factum est; nam* is my supplement for example's sake; the rest is Zelzer's.

> power; for in 89 Diocletian, when the 14th lune fell on 24 March, *we* celebrated Easter on 31 March; the Alexandrians and Egyptians, as they wrote, when the fourteenth lune fell on 28 Phamenoth, celebrated Easter on 5 Pharmouthi, which is 31 March, and this they agreed with us. Again in 93 Diocletian, when the 14th lune fell on 14 Pharmouthi, which is 9 April, which was a Sunday, Easter Sunday was celebrated on 21 Pharmouthi, which according to us was 16 April.'

In fact the Roman reckoning placed both Easters on the same days, but as *luna XXII*, though for 373 the Calendar of 354 records (or predicts) 24 March, which as *luna XV* was illegitimate at Rome and did not even satisfy the purpose of ecclesiastical unity.[8]

By 377 Ambrose was the bishop, but he had not been in 373; nor had he been in 360, when Milan had also observed the rule (§21, pp. 232–4):[9]

> *Reseratum est igitur diem resurrectionis obseruandum post diem passionis, qui dies resurrectionis non quarta decima luna debet esse sed postea* [...] *nec passionem domini die dominica posse celebrari, et si quarta decima luna in dominicam inciderit adiungendam ebdomadem alteram sicut et septuagesimo sexto anno ex die imperii Diocletiani factum est; nam tunc vicesimo octauo die Farmutii mensis qui est nonum kalendas Maias dominicam paschae celebrauimus sine ulla dubitatione maiorum.*
>
> 'It has therefore been shown that the day of the Resurrection must be observed after the day of the Passion, not on the fourteenth lune but afterwards [...] and that the Passion cannot be celebrated on Sunday, and that if the fourteenth lune falls on Sunday another week must be added, as indeed was done in 76 Diocletian; for then we celebrated Easter Sunday on 28 Pharmouthi, equivalent to 23 April, without any hesitation on our ancestors' part.'

In fact this was not a case of postponement, for Alexandrian *luna XIIII* was on Monday, 22 Pharmouthi (17 April),[10] but that is not the point. In

[8] Disbelieved by Krusch (1880), 69; Mosshammer (2008), 213; accepted in bafflement ('der Grund ist unfindbar') by Schwartz (1905), 52. On the Calendar see Salzman (1990).

[9] The rest of this section elaborates arguments put forward by me at the *First International Conference on the Science of Computus* (Galway, 2006) after Max Lejbowicz's paper, and incorporated into Lejbowicz (2010), 26–35.

[10] Not only in the definitive Alexandrian cycle, but in that of Anatolius, in the reconstructions for the corresponding year 265 of both Schwartz (1905), 17 and

76 Diocletian, that is AD 360, Ambrose was still a layman living in Rome, where Easter was not allowed to fall after the Parilia on 21 April, the City's birthday-feast, when all good Romans made merry, lest Christians fasting in Holy Week should be either harassed or tempted by roistering pagans.[11] Who then are the 'we' who unhesitatingly kept Easter on 23 April in that year? Obviously not the Western church as a whole; it must be the diocese of Milan; which is entirely appropriate for the political situation in 360.

In that year the bishop of Milan was Ambrose's predecessor Auxentius, who was a Homoian; that is to say, he maintained that the Son was like (ὅμοιος) the Father who begat him according to Scripture and eschewed the reference to his 'essence' in the terms used by other parties, ὁμοούσιος, 'of the same essence', *consubstantialis*, or ὁμοιούσιος, 'of like essence'. Now this Homoian formula, 'like the Father', was that laid down by the Council of Rimini the year before;[12] it had the support of the Emperor Constantius II and the bishop of Alexandria, George of Cappadocia. To be sure, it was not liked at Rome, but neither Pope Liberius nor the antipope Felix had any personal prestige: Liberius was a broken man, Felix an exile in the suburbs.[13] Nor was that all. According to the Roman tables, Liberius had a choice between 26 March, which came too late, on *luna XXIII*, and 16 April, which came too early, on *luna XV*; Rome forbade celebration before *luna XVI*, but postponement to *luna XXII* on the 23rd was impossible because of the Parilia.[14] For Auxentius, that was the moment to make it clear that he would not yield to the errors of his brother of Rome, whether in theology or computistics; he did so by accepting the calculations of the learned Alexandrians.

Mosshammer (2008), 161. Strangely enough, the index to Athanasius' festal letters, as transmitted, gives the lune of Easter Day as *XXI* – spelt out like other numbers in the Syriac text – in agreement with Ambrose's letter (Martin and Albert (1985), 260, app. crit. to l. 382), which conflicts not only with the stated epact 18, but with the Paschal lune of 341 (*XVI* on 19 April). This is not the only erroneous lune in the index (Mosshammer (2008), 178–82). The editors emend by deleting ܫܢ; Lejbowicz (2010), 29–30, taking their text for granted, supposes mistake or manipulation on Ambrose's part, but perhaps the false lune stood in his source.

[11] This rule already obtains in Hippolytus' table for the years 222–333; cf. Ideler (1825–6), ii 226.

[12] For the text of this creed see Kelly (1972), 293–4; for the doctrinal questions see Kelly (1977), 223–51, and for the struggles over them Chadwick (2001), 196–202, 226–30, 232–53, 260–92.

[13] See Kelly and Walsh (2010), 27–9 with sources; Chadwick (2001), 267–8.

[14] If the Calendar of 354 is to be trusted, Liberius chose 16 April; cf. Mosshammer (2008), 170, 211.

George was soon lynched, but Auxentius lasted till 374; Ambrose, his successor, as a convinced Homoousian venerated the Council of Nicaea, from which Alexandria claimed authority to determine Easter. Furthermore, despite his verbal deference to Rome, he firmly resisted the intrusion of Roman customs: if he would not let his flock bring food and wine to martyrs' shrines or make them fast on Saturdays, he would certainly not follow such a faltering guide as the *Supputatio Romana*, which for 387 offered either 21 March, a day too early, or *luna quinta decima* on 18 April. His letter says not a word about the Parilia, a feast for everyone in Rome and no-one in Milan.

Rome and Alexandria

In the early fourth century Rome and Alexandria had sometimes acquiesced in each other's Easters, especially when Athanasius needed Roman support against his enemies;[15] Alexandria last deferred in 349, but Rome became readier to accept the Alexandrian date provided it was no later than 21 April. That was not the case in 417, when Pope Zosimus celebrated on 25 March in preference to the Alexandrian date of 22 April; since he had been consecrated only a week before, he must have taken the date from his predecessor Innocent I, for by plunging the Church into an immediate Holy Week he would have produced total chaos; but both men had high views of Petrine authority and would not have deferred in a matter of age-old Roman custom to any other church.[16] However, it was remembered in Sicily that a miraculous font, wont to fill of its own accord for the Easter baptisms, had flowed on the Alexandrian, not the Roman date; so at least Bishop Paschasinus of Lilybaeum reported when, consulted by Pope Leo about the right date to observe in 444, he persuaded him to concur with Cyril of Alexandria in celebrating on 23 April, which as he soothingly remarked left the Passion, Good Friday, on the 21st.[17] The civic birthday feast was duly cancelled.

[15] See now Mosshammer (2008), 162–70.

[16] Innocent, although purporting to invite consultation over the Easter date of 414 (*Epistola XIV: De ratione paschali anni 414*, ed. in PL 20, 517–8), was in fact politely notifying Aurelius of his decision. For that year the *Supputatio Romana* and the Alexandrian computus both gave 22 March, *luna XVI*; Innocent's comment *nam quippiam minus est* is an understatement, since full moon did not take place till the afternoon of that day.

[17] For Paschasinus' letter see Krusch (1880), 245–50. The Roman lunar limits presuppose the notional identification of *luna XIIII* with Good Friday and *XVI* with Easter Sunday, which may be postponed but never advanced.

Leo, so certain of himself in theology, was out of his depth in computus, and Paschasinus knew it; but he also wished to spare the papal feelings. Instead of saying that the Roman tables, in which 444 was a rerun of 360 with its two illegal dates, were outdated and unworkable, he silently substituted the Alexandrian lunar calendar for the Roman, which eliminated 16 April but left 26 March looking lawful as *luna XXI*. Then, instead of explaining that Alexandria required not merely Easter but *luna XIIII* to follow the equinox (thereby disallowing 26 March, since *luna XIIII* would be the 19th), which was not what Leo had learnt from the Fathers, he blinded him with science: 444, being year 8 of the ogdoad (a term that Leo in all probability had never encountered), was embolismic, so that the only legitimate date was 23 April on *luna XVIIII*.

However, Leo must have been moved not only by bafflement, but by the principle of unity, which he invoked a few years later when again the Alexandrian date aroused disquiet in Rome. In mid 451, Leo noticed that the next Alexandrian Easter but three, that of what we call 455, was assigned not to 17 April as prescribed by the Roman reckoning, but to the 24th, a date that could not be accommodated even by the fudge of 444; unable to believe that it was right, but also unwilling that the two churches should keep two different days, he began a campaign to get it changed, first through Paschasinus, who was to be his legate at the Council of Chalcedon, then through his other legate Julian of Cos (or possibly Cius), and even writing to the Emperor Marcian himself, that he might exert his zeal in making the pretended experts explain themselves, so that the feast should stay within its traditional bounds:[18]

> *ut studium uestrum praestare dignemini, quatenus Aegyptii uel si qui sunt alii qui certam huius supputationis uidentur habere notitiam, scrupulum sollicitationis huius absoluant, ut in eum diem generalis obseruantia dirigatur qui nec paternarum constitutionum normam relinquat nec ultra praefixos terminos euagetur.*
>
> 'that you may deign to exert your zeal so that the Egyptians, or any others who appear to understand this reckoning, may clear away the scruple of this concern, that the general observance may be directed to such a day as neither departs from the rule of the Fathers' customs nor strays beyond the established limit.'

[18] *Epistola papae Leonis ad Marcianum imperatorem* of 15 June 453, §3 (Krusch (1880), 257–60: 268–60; Schwartz (1932), 74–5: 75).

Under the thin veneer of puzzlement, this was a plea that the emperor should bring the Alexandrians into line. Marcian, however, merely informed Bishop Proterius of Alexandria that Leo was wondering whether there had been a scribal error; the result was a letter, addressed directly by Proterius to the pope, explaining why Easter would correctly be celebrated on 29 Pharmouthi, that is 24 April.[19]

Let us look a bit more closely. Leo's authority is no longer Cyril but his uncle Theophilus, whose hundred-year table simply gave the dates of *Luna XIIII* and Easter; whereas Theophilus' feud with Chrysostom belonged to the past, Cyril's Christology, teaching one nature of the Incarnate Word, was proving no less capable of a heretical interpretation than that of his victim Nestorius, two natures and two hypostases in one person, which sometimes sounded more like two persons.[20] Indeed, Cyril's thuggish successor Dioscorus not only interpreted him in a manner unacceptable to Leo, speaking of 'one nature after the union' without bothering to add 'incarnate', but by the foulest means brought down the

[19] Krusch (1880), 269–78.

[20] Mosshammer (2008), 198 observes that 'Cyril was a controversial figure, only recently deceased'. Cyril and Nestorius were alike guilty of employing a word in more than one sense, and of interpreting the other's language according to their own usage. Cyril conceded that Christ possessed a human as well as a divine nature ('nature' meaning bundle of qualities), but preached 'the one incarnate nature of the Divine Word' ('nature' meaning existent being), which despite his explicit warning was misinterpreted as allowing the Lord only one (divine) nature *tout court* (the Monophysite heresy). Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople, who emphasized the integrity of the two natures, distinguished the one πρόσωπον (Person of the Trinity) from the two hypostases in which they subsisted and of which each was manifested in its own πρόσωπον; by those like Cyril who understood ὑπόστασις as 'Person of the Trinity', at most distinguishing the πρόσωπον as the external manifestation of the hypostasis, he was misinterpreted as teaching two Sons (the heresy miscalled Nestorian). Nestorius made himself unpopular by challenging St Mary's title Θεοτόκος, 'She who bore God'; Cyril, like his uncle Theophilus when he broke Chrysostom, was determined to put the upstart see of Constantinople in its place. Nestorius, on reading Pope Leo's Tome (*salva igitur proprietate utriusque naturae et in unam coeunte personam*), rejoiced that the truth had prevailed; however, he was anathematized at Chalcedon, which translated Leo's phrase into Greek but expanded 'one person' into 'one person and one hypostasis', in which the two terms might or might not be read as synonyms. The Christological problems, and their political expression, are well expounded in Chadwick (2001), 515–91. Recent attempts at healing the rifts have resorted to evasion: the joint declarations issued by Pope Paul VI with Moran Mor Ignatius Jacoub III, patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church, on 27 Oct. 1971 and with Pope Shenouda III of Alexandria, patriarch of the Coptic Church, avoids all reference to 'nature'; that issued on 11 Nov. 1994 by Pope John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, patriarch-catholicos of the Assyrian Church of the East, proclaims the preserved natures of divinity and humanity but avoids the troublesome term 'hypostasis'. In the fifth century, the Emperor Zeno omitted both words from his *Henotikon* of 482, a political attempt at suppressing dissension that failed of its purpose (Chadwick (2001), 592–611).

patriarch of Constantinople at the Robber Council of Ephesus in 449 to vindicate the archimandrite Eutyches, who went even further by denying that Christ's flesh was as ours, a view from which Dioscorus dissociated himself too late. At Chalcedon, Dioscorus was deposed, albeit for misconduct not for heresy, to the indignation of his church, which preferred his interpretation of Cyril to the official sanitized version; he was succeeded by his former archpresbyter Proterius, whom he had left in charge of his church and whose change of sides met with such violent and widespread hostility that his position could be sustained only by bribes and brutality.[21] The earliest narrative is the hostile account by Zacharias of Mytilene, preserved in a Syriac version that deforms his name from Proṭerios (ܦܪܘܛܪܝܘܣ) into Preṭorios (ܦܪܝܛܘܪܝܘܣ), the Governor's man.[22] Marcian's letter gave him the chance to demonstrate Greek intellectual superiority, and to pare the claws of this pretender to *plenitudo potestatis* who took the acclamation at Chalcedon 'Peter has spoken through Leo' not as contingent assent but as a job-description; it also let him take his mind off his own extreme unpopularity (which upon Marcian's death would lead to his assassination), or even get back at the man who (he might think) had put him in his current pickle, by insisting through his legates on the formula that Christ was known 'in two natures', which Dioscorus could not accept, and not the conveniently ambiguous 'from two natures', which he could.

Leo's arguments, if Proterius ever saw them, must have confirmed the prejudice ingrained in all Greek-speakers pagan and Christian of Latin intellectual deficiency. 'Our tables give the 17th' and 'the 24th is too late', because the limits are 22 March to 21 April, and the 24th drags even Good

[21] See Zacharias of Mytilene (465–after 536), *Historia ecclesiastica*, book 1 (preserved as book 3 in the eponymous Syriac chronicle), chs. 2, 11, book 2 (= 4 Syriac), ch. 2 (Monophysite: pro-Dioscorus, anti-Chalcedon, anti-Proterius); Liberatus, *Breviarium* (555 × 567), chs. 14–5 (PL 68, 1016–7; ultra-Chalcedonian, hostile to Fifth Council, anti-Dioscorus); Evagrius Scholasticus (536–94), *Historia ecclesiastica*, book 2, chs. 5, 9 (Orthodox: anti-Dioscorus). Hostile stories are told in the *Plerophoriae* of John Rufus, bishop of Maiouma, ed. by François Nau in the Patrologia Orientalis 8 (Paris, 1911), who reports prophecies that Dioscorus' successor would be a heretic and Antichrist (chs. 68–9, pp. 124–5), and describes Proterius as a 'sleeper with men and murderer' (ܫܠܝܦܐ ܥܡ ܓܒܪܐ ܘܩܛܠܐ, ch. 34, pp. 77–8).

[22] Sebastian Brock (pers. comm.) warns me that mistranscriptions of Greek names and titles, in particular misplacements of *waw*, are not infrequent in Syriac, citing the converse of our case from Rufus' *Plerophoriae*, ch. 36, p. 81, where a *praefectus praetorio* is ܦܪܘܛܪܝܘܣ ܩܘܦܣܘܣ for ὕπαρχος [*recte* ἔπαρχος] πραιτωρίων. Nevertheless, the spelling is consistent across several chapters and if not deliberate is the happiest of accidents. It is also found elsewhere (Payne Smith (1879–1901), ii 3259), but not in Rufus, much as he hates Proterius.

Friday out of bounds, but nothing to explain the 21 April limit, and nothing about *luna XIIII*, which Theophilus placed on the very day that Leo wished to keep. In a letter to Bishop Julian, Leo alleges that Easter had never been observed on 24 April;[23] he probably did not know that Anatolius' cycle required that date in 292, but had he bothered to read Theophilus' table, rather than consult it, he would have found the Alexandrian Easter of 25 April 387, which Proterius did not fail to mention.

Although Proterius' letter survives only in Latin, he wrote in Greek, leaving Leo to procure a translation; a gesture of superiority underlined by addressing him, not of course as *papa*, a title that Proterius received from his own clergy, nor yet as his brother and fellow bishop, which is what Leo called him, but as his brother and fellow priest, forcing humility upon Leo by assuming it himself.[24] He sets out his case from first principles, as to a schoolboy, and explains the need to postpone the festival when *luna XIIII* falls on Sunday as Pope Honorius would to the Irish and Braulio (lifting a phrase from our letter) to Eutropius; Rome fully agreed, but put *luna XIIII* in 455 on Wednesday, 14 April. He answers an objection that Leo had not made – that the feast would be kept in the second lunar month instead of the first – ascribing it to persons misled by 'Jewish fables', and points out that the first month of the computus does not begin at the equinox (which would have made it end before 24 April). After which he invites Leo to make recalcitrant clergy comply, as if he were addressing a divisional manager who had questioned the firm's policy.[25]

But why was he allowed to write directly, rather than reply through the emperor? True, Marcian claimed no expert knowledge, unlike Justinian, who interfered alike with Christian Easter and Jewish Passover;[26] still, having written *to* him, inviting him to put his imperial foot down, Leo might have expected an answer, even a decision, *from* him; instead the emperor cheerfully invited Proterius to check the calculations and if they were right to explain them to his Roman counterpart. I suggest that Marcian was getting even with an ungrateful pontiff whose Christology he had rammed down the throats of a reluctant Council only to have him delay ratification of its acts in protest at the canon conferring

[23] Krusch (1880), 260; Schwartz (1932), 76.

[24] As a Calvinist pastor drily observed: 'Cette Epître commence d'une maniere qui est peu Catholique Romain: *Domino meo dilectissimo fratri et consacerdoti Leoni Proterius in Domino salutem*' (Senebier (1779), 131).

[25] Krusch (1880), 276–8.

[26] Mosshammer (2008), 255–7.

second position after Rome on the church of Constantinople instead of Alexandria. Moreover, since the canon so offensive at Rome was even more offensive at Alexandria, Marcian might hope to set its two opponents by the ears.[27]

Totally defeated, for unity's sake Leo yielded under protest; and surrendering the *Supputatio Romana*, he commissioned new tables from Victorius of Aquitaine, whose bungling can be excused only if we suppose a brief at all costs to spare Rome the ultimate humiliation of keeping 25 April, and where possible to preserve Roman postponement from *luna XIIII* on Saturday. Nevertheless, his tables, to Columban's scorn, became canonical in Gaul, where in 577 and 590 they caused dissensions in which miraculous springs in Spain were enquired after and Roman practice was not.[28]

The Undead Reckoning

In 501, during the Acacian schism between Rome and Constantinople, the anti-Byzantine Pope Symmachus kept Easter on 25 March,[29] according to the old *Supputatio Romana*, exactly as Pope Zosimus had done 84 years previously,[30] rather than 22 April, the date kept not only, so far as we can tell,[31] by the rest of Catholic Christendom, but even by the

[27] On the dispute over this canon see Chadwick (2001), 586–7.

[28] Victorius' computistical works are edited by Krusch (1938), 4–52; Columban, *Epistola* I 3–5 (Walker (1957), 2–12); Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* V 17, X 23 (MGH SS rer. Merov. 1,1, 215, 514–5).

[29] See Symmachus' *Epistola ad Avitum episcopum Viennensem* of 3 Oct. 500 (PL 62, 51); *Fragmentum Laurentianum*, ed. by Duchesne (1886–92), i 44; cf. ibid. 264 n 8. On the schism: Chadwick (1981), 29–31, 41–5.

[30] There is no warrant for supposing with Krusch (1880), 124–9 (cf. also Krusch (1883)), that Symmachus was using the revised 84-year cycle known as the Zeitz Easter Table, in which the date was also 22 March (Krusch (1880), 122); see Schwartz (1905), 70–2.

[31] It was certainly the date prescribed by the *latercus* (Mc Carthy and Ó Cróinín (1987–8), 235 (repr. in Ó Cróinín (2003), 69) as revised by Mc Carthy (1993), 219; Holford-Strevens (1999), 874; Holford-Strevens (2008), 187); but if the churches in Gaul and Spain that kept Easter on 21 March 577 (see below) were still following third-century Roman rules that took no notice of the equinox but forbade celebration after 21 April or on *luna XV*, rather than evading ad hoc an unacceptable date in Victorius (as Krusch supposes in MGH SS rer. Merov. 1,1, 215), they too will have kept 25 March 501. The Galician church must have done so, if it observed the Roman solar limits of 22 March–21 April prescribed by Martin of Braga (Barlow (1950), 270–5), which prove the treatise the work neither of Athanasius nor of an Irish forger.

Arian Goths – King Theoderic had called him in for a word about it, though admittedly about other matters too.[32] Now the pope had not merely been cocking a snook at Constantinople, but reviving the ancient Roman prohibition on celebrating Easter after 21 April. But by 501 it mattered far more that the Catholics of Rome had broken their fast on what for the Goths was still the third Sunday of Lent, and that it was the Catholics, not the heretical Goths, who had departed from custom. Like the Irish later, Pope Symmachus was out of step with the Church universal.[33]

(Not) the Last Stand of the *latercus*

I shall not repeat here the familiar tale of how the *latercus* lost ground in the seventh and eighth centuries under Roman and Romanizing pressure: in the Columbanian monasteries of the Continent, in Ireland, England, and Pictland, and in 716 even on Iona, with the result that only the British were still faithful to it. In 768, according to the *Annales Cambriae*, the holy man Elfoddw, later archbishop of Gwynedd, persuaded the Welsh, who had resisted the Roman Easter since the disastrous encounter with Augustine of Canterbury,[34] finally to accept it.[35] Or was it finally?

In 1631 Archbishop Ussher, zealous to prove the purity (that is, nonpopery) of the ancient British and Irish churches, wrote:[36]

> But howsoever *Northwales* did, it is very probable that *West-wales* (which of all other parts was most eagerly bent against the traditions of the *Romane* Church) stood out yet longer. For we finde in the *Greeke* writers of the life of *Chrysostome*, that *certaine Clergie men which dwelt in the Iles of the Ocean*, repaired *from the utmost borders* of the habitable

[32] For the wider scandal, including Symmachus' mistresses (one of them named Conditaria or 'Spicy': *Fragmentum Laurentianum* (Duchesne (1886–92), i 46) and his 'left-handed acquittal', see Chadwick (1981), 31–5.

[33] *Fragmentum Laurentianum* (Duchesne (1886–92), i 44): *quod non cum uniuersitate celebrauerat*; cf. Bede's *contra uniuersalis ecclesiae morem celebrarent* at *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* III 25 (Colgrave and Mynors (1969), 294; Plummer (1896), i 181).

[34] Bede, *HE* II 2 (Colgrave and Mynors (1969), 136–40; Plummer (1896), i 82–3).

[35] Morris (1980), 88; cf. Corning (2006), 165.

[36] Ussher (1631), 113–4.

> world unto *Constantinople*, in the dayes of *Methodius* (who was Patriarch there, from the yeer DCCCXLII. to the yeere DCCCXLVII.) to enquire of *certaine Ecclesiasticall traditions, and the perfect and exact computation of Easter*. Whereby it appeareth, that these questions were kept a foot in these Ilands; and that the resolution of the Bishop of *Constantinople* was sought for from hence, as well as the determination of the Bishop of *Rome*, who is now made the only Oracle of the world.

His source was an anonymous life of St John Chrysostom, written in the late tenth century, recently edited by Sir Henry Savile, whose author is illustrating the worldwide spread of the saint's work:[37]

> κληρικοὶ γάρ τινες τῶν εἰς αὐτά που τὰ ἄκρα τῆς οἰκουμένης οἰκούντων ἕνεκά τινων ἐκκλησιαστικῶν παραδόσεων τελείας τε τοῦ πασχαλίου καὶ ἀκριβοῦς καταλήψεως τὴν βασιλίδα πόλιν καταλαβόντες τῷ ταύτης τὸ τηνικαῦτα πατριάρχῃ προσεληλύθασι (Μεθόδιος οὗτος ὁ ἐν πατράσιν ἐπίδοξος), ὑφ' οὗ πόθεν τε καὶ τίνος χάριν ἥκειν ἐρωτηθέντες, τῶν ὠκεανικῶν ἔφασαν εἶναι διατριβῶν, τήν τε αἰτίαν δι' ἣν ἐπιδεδημήκασι σαφῶς ἐξεῖπον αὐτῷ. τοῦ δὲ ποίαις τῆς θείας γραφῆς βίβλοις οἱ ἐκεῖσε κάτοικοι σχολάζουσιν ἐπειπόντος, τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ καὶ τῷ ἀποστόλῳ χρῆσθαι καὶ μόνοις ἀπελογήσαντο. ποίαις δὲ εἰρηκότος αὖθις πατέρων καὶ διδασκάλων στοιχοῦσιν ἐκδόσεσιν, ἓν εἶναι μόνον βιβλίον παρ' αὐτοῖς ἀπεκρίναντο, τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου πατρός· δι' οὗ τήν τε πίστιν τρανῶς καὶ τὴν τῶν ἐντολῶν ἀκρίβειαν μαθεῖν αὐτοῖς ἐξεγένετο· πολλῆς τε διεβεβαιοῦντο καθ' ἑκάστην ἐξ αὐτοῦ πληροῦσθαι τῆς ὠφελείας, εἶναί τε παρὰ πᾶσιν ἐπέραστον ἄγαν καὶ ποθεινὸν τουτὶ τὸ βιβλίον, φιλοπόνως αὐτοῖς ἄλλῳ παρ' ἄλλου μεταγραφόμενον.

> 'For certain clerics amongst those dwelling somewhere at the very extremities of the inhabited world, having landed in the imperial city on account of certain ecclesiastical traditions and the full and accurate apprehension of the Easter computus, approached its then patriarch (this was Methodios, the glorious amongst the Fathers); asked by him whence and for what they had come, they said that they pertained to the dwelling-places of Ocean,[38] and clearly told him the reason why they were present. When the patriarch continued: "Which books of divine Scripture do the men who dwell there study?", they stated that they used

[37] Anonymous, *Vita Chrysostomi*, ch. 53, ed. from MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Hist. gr. 52 by Savile (1610–2), viii 321, ll. 5–16; on p 293 the author lists twenty sources, the latest being Constantine Porphyrogenitus.

[38] The sea surrounding the known world.

> the Gospel and the Apostle alone.[39] And when he said: "And what publications of the Fathers and Doctors do they go by?", they answered that there was one and only one book with them, by the Golden-Mouthed father, through which it was granted them to learn clearly both the faith and the precision of the commandments, and they vehemently asserted that from it they were daily filled with much benefit, and that this book was much beloved and desirable with them all, being copied with grateful toil amongst them by one from another.'

Since the point of the story (on which the biographer then expatiates) is the saint's universality and not the clerics' problems, we never learn of the patriarch's answer; but on Ussher's interpretation we should thus have some desperately isolated clergy, even in the mid-ninth century, hoping, of course in vain, to get a better answer from New Rome than from Old.

Unfortunately for this romantic image of the last battle in a lost cause, Savile, in glossing the Anonymous's words 'the extremities of the inhabited world' as 'the islands of Ocean', relies on a fragmentary text from Paris ascribed to George of Alexandria, Melkite patriarch in the 620s.[40] This fragment (now lost) relates how 'certain clerics who were inhabitants of the isles of Ocean' came to Constantinople, but does not name the patriarch:[41]

> τὰ ἄκρα τῆς οἰκουμένης] τὰς νήσους τὰς ὠκεανικάς. Sic enim fragmentum Ms. ad me missum Lutetia: Quod in illo codice Georgio Alexand[rino] inscribitur; quàm verè nescio. Cuius partem describere huc spectantem non pigebit. τινὲς γὰρ τῶν φιλοθέων μετὰ τὴν πρὸς Κύριον ἐκδημίαν, τετρακισχιλίους ὀκτακισχιλίους[42] συναγαγόντες λόγους ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῦ βιβλίοις, περὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἠτονήκασιν, ὥστε πᾶσαν κυκλῶσαι τὴν ὑπ' οὐρανόν· οἱ λόγοι αὐτοῦ ἐπότισαν τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα, ὡς καί τινες

[39] The characteristic Eastern lectionaries, containing the portions respectively of the Gospels, and of Acts and the Epistles, to be read in church.

[40] To whom is also attributed an extant life that does not include our story, edited by Savile (1610–2), viii 157–263; Halkin (1977), 69–285. Against authenticity see Baur (1927), 5–7, who argues that not even a Melkite patriarch could have been so papalist, and suggests a monk-priest, perhaps from Alexandria and living in Rome or southern Italy.

[41] Savile (1610–2), viii, 'Notae', cols. 965–6.

[42] Savile gives the dative τετρακισχιλίοις ὀκτακισχιλίοις, agreeing with βιβλίοις, which seems too strained even for a bad writer, and leaving λόγους without an article; but even if the syntax were tolerable, 'having collected sermons in his 4800 books, they gave up on the rest' makes no sense. Nevertheless, even as emended the text reads awkwardly, unless we write λόγους <τῶν>.

κληρικοὶ τῶν ὠκεανικῶν νήσων ὑπάρχοντες οἰκήτορες προφάσει τινῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν παραδόσεων καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἁγίου πάσχα ἀκριβοῦς μεταλήψεως τὴν βασιλίδα καταλαβόντες πόλιν, καὶ τῷ ταύτης τηνικαῦτα ἐμφανισθέντες πατριάρχῃ, πόθεν τε καὶ τίνος χάριν ἥκειν ἐρωτηθέντες, τὸν ὠκεανικὸν ἔφησαν τῆς ἐσχατιᾶς οἰκεῖν κόλπον, καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν δι' ἣν παρεγένοντο σαφῶς διεξῆλθον. τοῦ δὲ πατριάρχου αὐτοὺς προσεπερωτήσαντος ποίοις τῆς γραφῆς οἱ τῶν ἐκεῖσε σχολάζουσι βιβλίοις; τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ καὶ τῷ ἀποστόλῳ χρῆσθαι μόνοις ἀπελογήσαντο. αὖθις δὲ πάλιν ὁ πατριάρχης, καὶ ποίας πατέρων ἢ διδασκάλων ἐκδόσεις κεκτῆσθαι;[43] ἓν καὶ μόνον βιβλίον εἶναι παρ' αὐτοῖς ἀπεκρίναντο,' Ἰωάννου τοῦ λεγομένου[44] πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, δι' οὗ πολλῆς ὠφελείας ἐξ αὐτοῦ[45] καθ' ἡμέραν μετέχειν εἰρήκασιν.

'*the extremities of the inhabited world*] the isles of Ocean. For so a manuscript fragment sent to me from Paris, ascribed in the book to George of Alexandria, with what truth I know not; it will not distress me to copy the part pertaining to this point: "For some of the lovers of God after his departure to the Lord, having collected 4800 sermons in his books, gave up on the rest, so as to circle the whole (earth) beneath the heaven;[46] his words have watered the whole world, so that even some clerics who were inhabitants of the isles of Ocean, having landed in the imperial city on the ground of certain ecclesiastical traditions and the accurate participation in the holy Pasch, appeared before its then patriarch, and been asked whence and for what they had come, said that they inhabited the bosom[47] of Ocean on the edge of the world, and clearly expounded the reason why they had come. When the patriarch asked them in addition 'Which books of Scripture do the local (clergy) study?', they stated that they used only the Gospel and the Apostle. The patriarch came back: 'What publications of the Fathers or Doctors do you possess?' They answered that there was one and only one book with them, by John, patriarch of Constantinople, called the Golden-Mouthed, through which they said they partook of much benefit from him daily."'

[43] Since in the seventeenth century a question-mark may be used with an indirect question, this may be either a corruption of κέκτησθε (cf. Cosmas' ὑμῖν), or a solecism for κέκτηνται or κεκτημένοι εἶεν like ἥκειν for ἥκουσιν or ἥκοιεν.

[44] The participle is clearly misplaced: the sense would be 'called the Patriarch of Constantinople, the Golden-Mouthed', as if his claim to the patriarchate were in doubt. It should precede, or follow, Χρυσοστόμου.

[45] This phrase should probably be deleted, allowing δι' οὗ to mean 'through whom' as in the other texts cited.

[46] That is what the text says, though presumably not what the author meant. His syntax is certainly bad enough for the purported George of Alexandria.

[47] Not 'gulf', which would require specification.

To be sure, Savile takes the location to be to the British Isles:[48]

> Μεθόδιος. Circa annum Domini 850. Atqui aliquot ante ea tempora saeculis sopita erat prorsus in Britannicis Insulis (de quibus sine dubio est haec narratio) teste Bedâ, de paschate dissensio.

> '*Methodius*] About AD 850. However, it was several generations before those times that the disagreement about Easter, according to Bede, had been completely laid to rest in the British Isles (which without a doubt this story concerns).'

Indeed, if the fragment were really George's work, the clerics would be Britons, appalled by Augustine's conduct at Bangor is y Coed, who appealed over his and the pope's head to the Oecumenical Patriarch. Ussher did not consider this possibility, which would mean jettisoning Methodios and the last-ditch stand; but that we must do in any case, for the language of this fragment closely resembles that in two texts by Cosmas Vestitor, who also does not name the patriarch and may well have been dead before Methodius' reign:[49] namely an unfinished life of Chrysostom and a display-speech on the translation of the saint's relics from Comana to Constantinople. The resemblances, especially of the former, to the *Fragmentum Savilianum* may suggest that the latter was no more than a first draft of it; but Cosmas was capable of borrowing all but word for word from his sources.[50] In the life, Chrysostom is known all over the world:[51]

> τινὲς γὰρ τῶν φιλοθέων μετὰ τὴν πρὸς Κύριον ἐκδημίαν αὐτοῦ, τετρακισχιλίας ὀκτακισχιλίας συναγαγόντες τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ βίβλους περὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἠτονήκασιν. οὐκ ἀπεικὸς γὰρ λέγειν περὶ αὐτοῦ. ἐξῆλθεν ὕδωρ ἐκ πέτρας χριστοτμήτου φλεβὸς καὶ ἐπότισε κόσμον. καὶ ἐκλήθησαν αἱ συναγωγαὶ τῶν πόνων αὐτοῦ δεξαμεναὶ θαλασσῶν. καὶ αἱ βίβλοι τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ ὠκεανοὶ σοφίας κυκλοῦσαι πᾶσαν τὴν ὑπ᾽ οὐρανόν.

> [7]᾽Αμέλει τινὲς ἐπὶ τῶν διππευσάντων καιρῶν κληρικοὶ καὶ τῶν ὠκεανικῶν νήσων ὑπάρχοντες οἰκήτορες προφάσει τινῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν παραδόσεων καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἁγίου πάσχα ἀκριβοῦς καταλήψεως τὴν βασιλίδα

[48] Ibid., 966.

[49] Beck (1959) supposes him to have lived between 730 and 850; Στεργιούλης (2008) lowers the *terminus post quem* to 750.

[50] Στεργιούλης (2008), 122–5.

[51] Chs. 6–7 (Halkin (1977), 435).

καταλαβόντες πόλιν καὶ τῷ ταύτης ἐμφανίσαντες τηνικαῦτα πατριάρχῃ, πόθεν τε καὶ τίνος χάριν ἥκειν ἐρωτηθέντες, τὸν ὠκεανικὸν ἔφησαν τῆς ἐσχατιᾶς οἰκεῖν κόλπον, καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν δι' ἣν παρεγένοντο σαφῶς διεξῆλθον. τοῦ δὲ πατριάρχου πάλιν αὐτοὺς προσεπερωτήσαντος ποίαις τῆς γραφῆς οἱ τῶν ἐκεῖσε σχολάζουσι βίβλοις, τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ καὶ τῷ ἀποστόλῳ μόνοις χρᾶσθαι ἀπελογίσαντο. αὖθις δὲ τοῦ πατριάρχου καὶ ποῖαί φησιν[52] εἰρηκότος πρὸς αὐτοὺς πατέρων ὑμῖν καὶ διδασκάλων ἐκδόσεις, ἓν καὶ μόνον βιβλίον εἶναι παρ' αὐτοῖς ἀπεκρίναντο,' Ιωάννου τοῦ λεγομένου Χρυσοστόμου, δι' οὗ πολλῆς ὠφελείας καθ' ἡμέραν μετέχειν συνέθεντο, καὶ τὴν μὲν ἐκκλησίαν ὡς ἔν τινι τούτῳ περιφανεῖ καταυγάζεσθαι φεγγεῖ, τὸν δὲ λαὸν ταῖς τούτου καταλαμπρύνεσθαι ἀκτῖσιν, εἶναί τε παρὰ πᾶσιν ἐπιθυμητικὸν[53] καὶ κόρον τοῦ γλυκασμοῦ δαψιλῶς ἐκπληροῦντα ταῖς ἁπάντων ψυχαῖς. ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὸ προκείμενον ἐπέλθωμεν.

'For some of the lovers of God after his departure to the Lord, having collected 4800 books of his sermons, gave up on the rest. For it is no bad likeness to say of him: Water has come out of the rock of Christ-cut vein and watered the earth; and the collections of his works were called receptacles of seas, and the books of his words are oceans of wisdom as they circle the whole (earth) beneath the heaven.

For instance, in days of yore certain clerics who were inhabitants even of the isles of Ocean, having landed in the imperial city on the ground of certain ecclesiastical traditions and the accurate apprehension of the holy Pasch, appeared before its then patriarch, and been asked whence and for what they had come, said that they inhabited the bosom of Ocean on the edge of the world, and clearly expounded the reason why they had come. When the patriarch asked them in addition which books of Scripture the local [clergy] studied, they stated that they used only the Gospel and the Apostle. When again (he says) the patriarch said to them: "And what publications of the Fathers and Doctors have you?", they answered that there was one and only one book with them, that of John, called the Golden-Mouthed, through which they agreed that they daily partook of much benefit, and that the church was lit up by it as by a light seen all around, and the laity were made splendid by its rays, and that it was an object of desire amongst them all and abundantly replenished the satiety of sweetness in the souls of all. But let us return to our theme.'

[52] Halkin marks this word for deletion, but cf. φασίν in the oration below; the singular and plural forms are frequently exchanged in manuscripts, but φησίν is found in the general sense 'saith mine author'.

[53] Having an active sense, this must be an error for ἐπιθυμητόν, as in the oration below.

The corresponding text in the oration (which continues with rodomontade in the saint's honour irrelevant to our purpose) runs:[54]

> τοιοῦτος ὁ τὰς τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου σχολάζων ἐνθηκεῦσαι νομισθήσεται βίβλους, ὃν τρόπον καί τινες, ὡς λόγος, τετρακισχιλίας ὀκτακοσίας αὐτοῦ συναγαγόντες βίβλους περὶ τῶν λοιπῶν αὐτοῦ ἠτονήκασιν ἐκδοῦναι. οὐκ ἀπεικὸς γὰρ λέγειν περὶ αὐτοῦ· ἐξῆλθεν ὕδωρ ἐκ πέτρας χρυσοτμήτου φλεβὸς καὶ ἐπότισε χρυσοστομικῆς διδασκαλίας καὶ ἐκλήθησαν αἱ συναγωγαὶ τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ δεξαμεναὶ θαλασσῶν καὶ αἱ βίβλοι τῶν πόνων αὐτοῦ ὠκεανοὶ σοφίας κυκλοῦσαι πᾶσαν τὴν ὑπ᾽ οὐρανόν. [. . .]᾽ Ἀμέλει τινὲς ἐπὶ τῶν διππευσάντων καιρῶν κληρικοὶ καὶ τῶν ὠκεανικῶν ὑπάρχοντες διατριβῶν προφάσει τινῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν παραδόσεων καὶ τῆς τοῦ πασχαλίου τελείας καὶ ἀκριβοῦς καταλήψεως τὴν βασιλίδα καταλαβόντες πόλιν τῷ ταύτης πατριάρχῃ ἐμφανισθέντες τηνικαῦτα πόθεν τε καὶ τίνος χάριν ἥκειν ἐρωτηθέντες, τὸν ὠκεανικὸν ἔφησαν οἰκεῖν κόλπον, καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν δι᾽ ἣν παρεγένοντο σαφῶς διεξῆλθον. τοῦ πατριάρχου πάλιν αὐτοὺς προσερωτήσαντος ποίαις τῆς γραφῆς οἱ τῶν ἐκεῖσε σχολάζουσι βίβλοις, τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ καὶ τῷ ἀποστόλῳ χρᾶσθαι μόνοις ἀπελογίσαντο. αὖθις τοῦ πατριάρχου καὶ ποίαις φασὶν εἰρηκότος πρὸς αὐτοὺς πατέρων παρ᾽ ὑμῖν καὶ διδασκάλων ἐκδόσεσιν, ἓν καὶ μόνον βιβλίον εἶναι παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς ἀπεκρίναντο, Ἰωάννου τοῦ λεγομένου Χρυσοστόμου, δι᾽ οὗ πολλῆς ὠφελείας συνέθεντο καθ᾽ ἡμέραν πληροῦσθαι, καὶ τὴν μὲν ἐκκλησίαν ὡς ἔν τινι τούτῳ μονογενεῖ κατευφραίνεσθαι τέκνῳ, τὸν δὲ λαὸν ὡς ἔν τινι τούτῳ μονοφεγγεῖ καταλάμπεσθαι ὀφθαλμῷ, εἶναί τε παρὰ πᾶσιν ἐπιθυμητὸν τὸ τοιοῦτον βιβλίον παρ᾽ ἄλλου καὶ ἄλλου καθ᾽ ἑκάστην ἐμπόθως μεταγραφόμενον [. . .]

> 'Such [sc. like one who would number the currents of the sea] will he be thought who studies to store Chrysostom's books, in the way indeed that some, as the story goes, having collected 4800 books by him gave up on publishing the rest. For it is no bad likeness to say of him: Water has come out of the rock of gold-cut vein and watered with Golden-Mouthed wisdom; and the collections of his works were called receptacles of seas, and the books of his words are oceans of wisdom as they circle the whole (earth) beneath the heaven. [Cosmas explains his image.] For instance, in days of yore certain clerics pertaining even unto the dwelling-places of Ocean, having landed in the imperial city on the ground of certain ecclesiastical traditions and the full and accurate apprehension of the Easter computus, appeared before its patriarch then, and been asked whence and for what they had come, said that they inhabited the bosom of Ocean, and clearly expounded the reason why they had come. When the patriarch asked them in addition, "Which

[54] Δυοβουνιώτης (1925), 66–7, *or.* 3, ll. 34–40, 45–60.

> books of Scripture do the local [clergy] study?", they stated that they used only the Gospel and the Apostle. When again (they say) the patriarch said to them: "And what publications of the Fathers and Doctors [do you use] in your possession?", they answered that there was one and only one book with them, that of John, called the Golden-Mouthed, through which they agreed that they were daily filled with much benefit, and that the church rejoiced in him as in an only-begotten son, the laity were illuminated by him as by an only-shining [eye = source of] light, and that such book was desired amongst them all, being lovingly copied every day by one person after another.'

The pattern of resemblances suggests that the *Fragmentum Savilianum*, the least elaborated among the known recensions of the story, is the earliest, followed in order by Cosmas' Life, his oration, and lastly the anonymous life, which alone mentions Methodius and which cites Cosmas in its initial list of authorities. Thus it is far easier to suppose that the fragment's 4800 sermons in Chrysostom's books swelled in Cosmas to 4800 books than that a later author wantonly reduced the saint's achievements;[55] hence the bald statements that follow are not an unskilful abridgement of Cosmas' exposition, but the raw material that he expanded in his unfinished life and even more in his oration. Whereas in the fragment the far-travelled clerics' single book merely brings them daily profit, in Cosmas it also illumines the church and enlightens the people; but whereas in the life the balancing of the antithesis goes no further than the ending of both clauses in synonymous passive infinitives with the same prefix and synonymous nouns in the dative (καὶ τὴν μὲν ἐκκλησίαν ὡς ἔν τινι τούτῳ περιφανεῖ καταυγάζεσθαι φεγγεῖ, τὸν δὲ λαὸν ταῖς τούτου καταλαμπρύνεσθαι ἀκτῖσιν), in the oration the image is varied but the parallelism extends over seven words, the infinitives are isosyllabic, likewise the preceding adjectives, like-declined compounds with the same first element, and the number of syllables between the final stresses becomes even, as required by the Byzantine *cursus*, instead of odd (τὴν μὲν ἐκκλησίαν ὡς ἔν τινι τούτῳ μονογενεῖ κατευφραίνεσθαι τέκνῳ, τὸν δὲ λαὸν ὡς ἔν τινι τούτῳ μονοφεγγεῖ καταλάμπεσθαι ὀφθαλμῷ). But in addition to heightened artistry, the oration also brings in the constant copying that will reappear in the anonymous life.

Criticism of the sources leads to criticism of the story, and of Ussher's interpretation. While it would be easy enough, in the seventh and eighth centuries, to find a context for an appeal against the Roman computus

[55] See n 42; but even unemended, the text would exclude the unexamined books.

by British or indeed Irish clerics, and perhaps possible to suppose them aware that Rome and Constantinople disagreed on several things,[56] but not that the computus was not amongst them, it is harder to imagine them so ill provided with books that they had nothing but two lectionaries and a Latin translation of works by Chrysostom, yet still able to make themselves understood in a no longer Latin-speaking city without the aid of such interpreters as might betray them to the pope.

In any case, there is nothing in the story to place the clerics' home in West Wales, or Ireland, or any other portion of the British Isles. It is true that they lie within the bosom of Ocean, but so do many other islands; there is no textual support for supposing these mysterious visitors to have come from this rather than from any other peripheral archipelago, if one can be conceived so ill provided with the literature of the Faith. Indeed, location in the West is hardly credible,[57] for although the use of lectionaries is universal, these lectionaries are distinctly Eastern, in the West the combined *Comes* or *Liber comicus* being still preferred; any question about the computus would therefore concern, not the *latercus*, but the sixth-century adoption in Constantinople, and rejection by the non-Chalcedonian churches, of the definitive Alexandrian reckoning, which in 570, 665, and 760 entailed celebration on 6 April instead of the 13th.[58]

However, the reference to the πασχάλιον that engaged Ussher's interest would seem to be secondary, appearing only in Cosmas' oration and the anonymous life, whereas the earlier texts – the *Fragmentum Savilianum* and Cosmas' life – speak of 'the holy Pasch'; this is no less compatible with questions concerning the proper form of worship, with which indeed the fragment's μεταλήψεως, altered by Cosmas, suits better. In short, not only must we leave Patriarch Methodios out of it, but the clergy did not come from the British Isles and were probably not concerned about the computus – if indeed they ever existed, which one may be permitted to doubt. I am sorry to spoil a good story, and one that I myself have told, *sed magis amica ueritas*.

[56] See Chadwick (2003), 59–94.

[57] Στεργιούλης (2008), 149, without argument, makes them come from the Crimea (ἀπό τη Ταυρική χερσόνησο).

[58] See Mosshammer (2008), 276–7.